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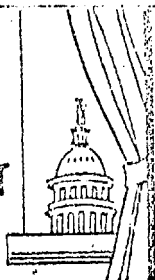
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WINDOW ON WASHINGTON

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Proxmire's War Views

WASHINGTON—"It is time we gave far greater consideration to the suspension of bombing of North Vietnam," Sen. William Proxmire declared last week.

U.S. air attacks "have strengthened, not weakened the will of the North Vietnamese people." Furthermore, he pointed out, Hanoi and the Viet Cong are making statements and gestures which possibly indicate their readiness to enter negotiations.

If we stop the bombing of the North and the search-and-destroy operations in the South, this might create an atmosphere suitable for peace talks, he said.

Proxmire conceded there was a risk involved, but he thought it a risk worth taking. More and more members of the Senate are coming to agree with this view, he said and he hoped "the President would soon lean toward such a policy."

The Wisconsin senator was an early supporter of the air attacks and the stepped-up U.S. ground assaults. Then in February of 1966 he presented to the Senate a detailed analysis of the social evils in South Vietnam that had sparked the Viet Cong rebellion. He upheld U.S. military intervention as "a tragic but essential action" but he wanted it accompanied by "a far more ambitious job of schooling, health and land reform."

"What a bloodless victory awaits a really vigorous and adequate land reform program on our part," he said at that time.

In the year since he presented his findings, U.S. troops have grown from 180,000 to more than 400,000. Land reform and other social programs remain virtual pipe dreams, despite the big talk at Honolulu and Manila by President Johnson and allied chieftains.

Proxmire now feels that the American military role is "arguable." It could be argued, he said, that unless we reduce the Viet Cong through sheer military capacity, South Vietnam won't have the opportunity to build a decent, workable society. On the other hand, "moderating the military effort might bring about a like response and create an atmosphere of trust in which civil government could function with some success."

He is emphatic in his contention that the present government in Saigon, coming mainly from the landlord class, is not interested in promoting the welfare of the peasantry.

"We ought to insist on it as the price of American support," he said. "We have strong bargaining power."

But he conceded that—as a result of Johnson's embrace of Air Marshal Ky and other instances of fulsome praise from high Administration sources—the Saigon regime has bargaining power of its own.

Proxmire was not disturbed by the recent strategic decision to take the bulk of the South Vietnamese Army off the firing line and assign them to "pacification" and "revolutionary development" chores in the villages. This was logical, he felt, because they are "the same kind of people with the same language."

But again, he feared that the Saigon leadership won't be up to the task. "What I would like to see in Vietnam are far more Americans of the Peace Corps-type — technicians, health workers with a broad social outlook."

Thant's Revealing Meeting

UNITED NATIONS Secretary General U Thant recently held an off-the-record meeting with a group of American women peace leaders. Here is an account of what transpired:

The women found Thant very much determined to be a mediator in the Vietnam war—and, in that role, he is exerting utmost pressure on both sides to modify their positions so as to reach a settlement.

He described to them the hard paradox he was up against. The North Vietnamese declare they will not enter negotiations but, he said, they are holding discussions with U. S. representatives.

On the other hand, the U.S. proclaims its readiness to talk peace at any time—but when secret negotiations start showing some sign of promise, the U. S. escalates its military attack.

For example, he said, secret talks were going very well in Algeria in mid-December, until American planes bombed the city of Hanoi.

A Thant aide interjected at this point: "That's why some of us call it the CIA war!"

On the plus side, Thant voiced high praise for U. S. Ambassador Arthur Goldberg, declaring "he and I see things the same way." But the women peace workers were not completely reassured. Although they judged Thant to be "very much with it and a real operator," they didn't know if he realized how much the Administration limited and undercut Goldberg's authority.